

Russia; (4) during the Spring 2012, the protestors showed its flexibility in using various forms of action repertoire: pickets, meetings, permanent and mobile camps, walks along the city's boulevards with prominent writers, artists, painters as well as the counter-claims and litigations. All in all, in this period the protest actions embraced more than 30 cities. It is indicative that protest organisers in order to avoid clashes with the police used to practice carnival form of collective action open to all who wish to join it; (5) but this carnivalisation does not mean the decline of self-organisation. On the contrary, the new forms of self-organisation mushroomed. Each initiative group of the movement developed a particular form of activity ranging from the project the 'Observer' (of the electoral procedures of the past and forthcoming elections) to protestor's camps with disputes and lectures and full services including voluntary guards. The further the more an internet is used as a universal tool (for communication, fundraising, learning by doing, etc.); and (6) finally, the leadership of the movement is still an open question. On the one hand, the leaders of its radical wing who were sentenced many times have authority over a good deal of protestors. On the other hand, the young middle-class protestors move forth the leaders from their ranks. They incline to support the public figures which offer the concrete, mainly short-term, goals and programmes.

9. Conclusion

The very fact that for the first time after democratic upsurge (ie after perestroika) Russia was encumbered with mass protest meetings is rather indicative because it has already a set of political consequences. First, it means not only that Russian society is politically awakened, but that its confidence in the current political system has been exhausted. It became clear that substantial changes in existing political system are at stake.

Second, the protest mobilization revealed that contemporary Russian society is split into numerous antagonistic groups: the centre vs. the provinces; the 'new middle-class', a challenger of changes, vs. the adherents of stability; the TV-people vs. the Internet-people; the internationalists vs. the patriots; the radical patriots vs. the responsible nationalists. It means that mobilization has revealed the true disposition of social forces.

Thirdly, a new type of oppositional social movement – network-based – is being rapidly formed nationwide. This movement won a place on the political arena. More than that, it institutionalized in the form of new legal political parties; it engendered various forms of civic control over the electoral processes at all levels; and initiated the establishment of groups of the same control by the internet civic observers. Finally, the protest mobilization and its aftereffects forced the power elite to embark on the way of dialogue with opposition.

Fourthly, while the opposite part having the mighty financial and administrative resources at hand it nevertheless was forced to change its position from ‘full rejection’ to ‘preemption’ and to even the dialog and compromises with its adversaries. But to such a dialog when a steering wheel is kept in the hands of power elite.

Anyhow, the burden of the past keeps weighing upon the situation. The government is stepping up pressure on the opposition forces, while the changes in the political system it offers are not of a strategic character. As to the ‘new middle-class’, it is too small and politically immature to initiate serious political changes. It is indicative that the mass protest movement under consideration is not homogeneous and linear in character; there is no proportionality between its causes and its strength as well. This movement has a variety of goals and is heterogeneous as to the social and political forces involved, who act together in a short run only. Nevertheless, it is important that the set of protest waves had united internet-based ‘centre of command’.

What will be happening in the foreseeable future? The opinions of Russian analysts differ. Some hold that we shall see ‘retreat and restoration’ and ‘tightening of the screws’. Others think that the government will get weaker in the next six years, will make some concessions and try to appease the people in the habitual way: first give money to the one side, then to the other, and so on. Still others believe that Russia is back in February 1917 politically. All analysts agree that the government will try to fragmentise the opposition, while some are sure that the opposition has already divided. In my view, a new wave of mass political protest can be provoked only by sharp destabilization of the geopolitical situation (landslide of oil prices, international sanctions) or the belt-tightening policy, which would hit the masses of socially vulnerable population. Then it would be not a protest but

rather something akin to a ‘Russian revolt’ [16]. There is a probability of the first, and the second, and the third. However, as Russian social historians suggested a good while ago, in the longer term of a few decades we shall more probably be observing a specifically Russian ‘cycle’, that is, alternate motion: a modernization breakthrough – a slow and painful retreat – a new head start (Akhiezer, 2006). But such is a picture seen in historical perspective. As to the people, they ‘have to make existential choice actually every single day. They have to survive overcoming apathy – the reaction of the collective unconscious to the terrible 20th century,... to go on living and not degrading but becoming more sophisticated – that is how the task for the Russian intellectual stands today’ (Mirzoev, 2011: 20).

Notes

1. Most probably, this will not last long. That is why the ideology of Eurasian community has been called into play once again by the power elite, this time with a definite purpose: to recreate the core of the former Soviet Union. ‘In the last months <of 2011 – *O.Ya.*> Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan achieved considerable progress in the matter of cooperation by signing a declaration on Eurasian economic integration’ (Zhiltsov, 2011: 11).

2. In accordance with some unofficial calculations, there are about 60 thousand small settlements without population at all.

3. In this way, large cities confirmed once again their role of political and social centres even in the presence of a network community.

4. During one year the protest environmental movement ‘Save Khimky Wood’ in a Moscow suburb turned from a one-point drive for preserving an oak grove into a symbol of movement against the destruction of Russian living environment. A. Chirikova, leader of the drive, became one of the leaders of the all-Russia movement ‘For Fair Elections’ in December 2011. One more example: A small volunteer group led by Doctor Liza who helped victims of forest and peat fires in 2010 turned into an international public charity organization ‘Fair Aid’ in 2011 (<http://doctorliza.ru>).